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ABSTRACT

Intended for those involved in the production and use of children's books, this report calls attention to the need to create more and better books for and about handicapped children to help them overcome some of the barriers of isolation and loneliness that often separate them from their peers and condemn them to marginal lives outside the mainstream of society. Following brief discussions of the special educational challenges posed by handicapped children and of the different kinds of handicaps found among children, the report covers a number of topics, including the following: (1) the role of books in the everyday life of a handicapped child; (2) the special needs of children in institutions; (3) the need for braille, talking, tactile, large print, sign language, and easy reading books; (4) the use of children's books as a starting point for other activities; and (5) the depiction of handicapped children in books. A concluding section summarizes the main points made in the report. (FL)

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THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN INTEGRATING HANDICAPPED CHILDREN INTO EVERYDAY LIFE

by Tordis Ørjasaeter

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Introduction

As the International Year of the Child, 1979, provided Unesco with the occasion to focus on the importance of children's books in the life of the child, so it is hoped that the International Year for Disabled Persons, 1981, will enable Unesco to call attention to the crucial role that books can play in integrating handicapped children into the everyday life of the world around them.

The present paper is intended to make all those involved in children's books — publishers, authors, illustrators, librarians — aware of the need to produce more and better books for and about handicapped children so as to overcome some of the barriers of isolation and loneliness that so often separate them from their peers and condemn them to marginal lives outside the mainstream of society.

The author, Professor Tordis Ørjasaeter, is a member of the faculty of the Norwegian Postgraduate Teacher Training Center of Special Education. Her remarks constitute an informed guide as to how and what to publish for this special audience and an eloquent plea that the International Year for Disabled Persons serve as a springboard for long-range programmes and commitments to meet the book needs of handicapped children throughout the world.

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN INTEGRATING HANDICAPPED CHILDREN INTO EVERYDAY LIFE

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Conclusions

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN: A CHALLENGE

The International Year of Disabled Persons not only concerns the disabled persons themselves and their organizations, but also to a high degree those working with children's literature. We need more and better books for disabled children, and we need books that give them information and possibilities for identification.

It is not only a matter of improving education, but also of providing opportunities for leisure-time activities. Most handicapped children live in a sterile environment. Like all other children, however, they need cultural stimulation to help build up their awareness of their own "ego" and to facilitate and enrich their contact with other people. This is especially important for those who feel different and isolated. Reading will always increase one's knowledge of words and reduce the distance between the handicapped person and his surroundings. Helen Keller expressed it this way: "Books not only give me the pleasure and knowledge which other readers obtain, but also the information others receive through sight and hearing".

We have been accustomed to using the concept handicapped. The United Nations has now chosen the word disabled, probably because the old notion has acquired a negative meaning and because a new word should make us think in a new way. Regardless of which word we choose, the expression itself is a relative one. It reflects our view of people and societies, and it also reflects how narrow or broad is our view of normality. It is actually wrong to use the concept "handicapped" without defining handicapped in relation to what and in which situations. First and

foremost, one is just a person. There is more that unites than separates us.

Handicapped children are, above all, children, with children's needs, reactions and individual differences. There are just as wide variations within groups with the same general disorder as there are among other children. Each child is unique, with needs of his own as well as capacities, problems and possibilities.

Blind children are handicapped only in relation to printed books, but not to books in braille. Those who are deficient in reading find it hard to read books set in ordinary type, close print, and with long sentences. They are handicapped in relation to these books but not to books with simple language and easily read typography. One who is mentally retarded is as a rule handicapped in relation to intellectually demanding books, but not necessarily in relation to books sufficiently simple in content and layout.

For the blind child it is natural not to see. For the deaf child it is just as natural not to hear. It is unnatural for our eyes and for our ears because we are accustomed to experiencing the world around us with our senses of sight and sound. For many people a handicap is something rare, because most of the deaf, blind, mentally and physically handicapped are not in the streets or in the shops, in our homes or places of work at conference tables with authors and publishers, or at book fairs.

In many economically developed countries an unfortunate segregation policy has for a long time caused handicapped children to be placed in large institutions or more or less isolated in their home surroundings. A whole and

constructive community consists of all types of people. Integration has now become a slogan. What does it mean then - to integrate handicapped persons into ordinary society?

It does not mean - as most of us would like to think - that the handicapped are now allowed to join us in order to become as "normal" as possible - that is, like us. Integration is something totally different. It means that you are allowed to keep your own identity and become an independent part of a larger unit. Integration means that you contribute something to the unit. Ordinary schools, families and local society need the handicapped ones just as much as the handicapped have a natural and justified claim to belong to the society into which they are born.

When integration has often proved so difficult in practice, part of the reason is that we lack the right material for instruction in our schools. This includes good children's books for different levels of speech and reading and for children with sensory defects. Even the thought of integration clashes with efficiency, productivity and speed upon which society places such importance. It takes time to change our attitude when we know so little about the lives of the disabled. We are all afraid of the unknown. Lack of knowledge produces anxiety, and the distance between anxiety and aggression is alarmingly short. A society can always use scapegoats. We need literature to prepare and produce nearness.

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN - WHO ARE THEY?

There are a variety of diagnoses: mentally handicapped, physically handicapped, autistic, deaf, blind, partially sighted, cerebral palsy, brain damage, and many many more. While we concentrate on the theme of the role of children's literature in integrating handicapped children into everyday life, it is not the handicap itself which interests us but the effect the handicap has on the development of speech and the ability to read and understand books.

Most handicapped children will be delayed in their language development. Consequently they will probably have problems with their emotional as well as with their social development. And they may have reading difficulties as well. In addition we have dyslectic children, those with reading difficulties as their primary problem. We also have all the children who are functioning as language deficient and reading retarded, as, for example, immigrant children and the increasing number of culturally deprived children. These groups together amount to a large percentage of all children in the world.

First and foremost they are children, with children's basic needs; in addition they are handicapped and this creates the need for books to further their language development and also their social and emotional growth. They can use some of our ordinary children's books, but they will also need books especially made for them.

Rather than concentrate on each individual handicap, we should identify the common problem shared by many

handicapped children, that is to say, they are language retarded:

- Either because they are deaf, or have difficulties in hearing, in which case they have only a slight possibility to imitate the spoken word.

- Or they are mentally handicapped, so that our words are too difficult for them. They have, of course, just as great a need for experiences and development as everyone else.

- Or because they suffer from developmental dysphasia, or are autistic, so that they cannot comprehend words as means of communication.

- Or they are blind and have problems in understanding the numerous words which are related to sight and the experience of seeing.

For most of us, speech is the link by which we make contact with others. Our entire social and intellectual development is dependent on well developed speech and it is difficult to imagine how problematic learning situations become when one cannot use words or abstract ideas as aids for instruction in the widest sense, including upbringing and all learning.

The role played by language in our development is best understood when we come together with these children who have different language problems and whose difficulties increase year by year. For them, teaching must concentrate on learning words, which are the most important instruments of the mind.

Experience has shown that lullabyes and rhymes may stimulate language for those who can hear the human voice, and that picture books as well stimulate language development for those who can see. All children need books. But our handicapped children need them even more than dc other children.

BOOKS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

In Cushla and her books Dorothy Butler has given us quite a remarkable portrait of a girl chronically ill from birth who has had long periods in hospitals in great pain. She suffers from a delayed physical development which includes difficulty in focusing her eyes and controlling her movements. Some doctors also think she is mentally retarded. She is lucky enough to have had a happy childhood thanks to plenty of books from as early an age as four months. Her parents have to carry her most of the day and night, comforting her, and helping her through fits. They constantly sing and read to her and show her pictures. The sound of the human voice and the sight of colour, calm and stimulate her at the same time. It becomes natural for these parents to use picture books, rhymes and lullabyes. The author says in a post-script:

> "How can one assess the contribution of her books to the quality of Cushla's life?
>
> It seems clear that access to such a wealth of words and pictures, in a setting of consistent love and support, has contributed enormously to her cognitive development in general and her language in particular.
>
> But perhaps, most of all, Cushla's books have surrounded her with friends; with people and warmth and colour during the days when her life was lived in almost constant pain and frustration. The adults who have loved her and have tried to represent the world to her when she could not do this for herself have played their parts. But perhaps it was the characters themselves who went with her into the dark and lonely places that only she knew.
>
> And perhaps they will always be with her; Peter Rabbit and Grandmother Lucy, Mr Gumpy and James, followed by a procession of cats and kings, tigers and bears, with Davy and Emma and Naughty Agapanthus bringing up the rear. If so, she will be well fortified.

Perhaps Cushla's own words, recorded on 18 August 1975, when she was three years, eight months old, tell us all we need to know. They were spoken as she settled herself on the sofa, her rag doll in her arms and the usual pile of books at her side: "Now I can read to Lobby Lou, 'cause she's tired and sad, and she needs a cuddle and a bottle and a book."

Surely a prescription for any child, with or without handicaps."

And the author concludes:

"Seven years ago, before Cushla was born, I would have laid claim to a deep faith in the power of books to enrich children's lives. By comparison with my present conviction, this faith was a shallow thing. I know now what print and picture have to offer a child who is cut off from the world, for whatever reason. But I know also that there must be another human being, prepared to intercede, before anything can happen. Had she been born to other parents - however intelligent and well-intentioned - Cushla might never have encountered, as a baby, word and picture between the covers of a book. Certainly, no authority prescribes reading aloud for chronically ill babies whose handicaps are thought to be mental as well as physical.

It is in the hope of recruiting more human links between books and the handicapped children of the world that Cushla's parents have agreed to the publication of her story. We are all confident that a much older Cushla will want to help with this recruitment. We think that Cushla's belief in books as bridges may be even stronger than ours. "

A handicap of whatever kind almost always means loneliness. "The children in children's books are our friends" the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren once said. Handicapped children need friends more than others because they will usually be more lonely than other children.

Cushla's parents started with books when Cushla was only four months old. According to recent brain research, an unborn child reacts to sounds as early as the 16th - 18th week so there is no reason why we should not sing for it before birth. Many young people in our economically

developed countries often live far from their relatives, and cannot remember the old songs and lullabyes. There is a need for collections of lullabyes and nursery rhymes so that parents can learn them or be reminded of the songs they heard when they were children. It is important for all children to be sung to, just as it is important for all children to experience colour in picture books from an early age and to recognize objects from daily life in their books. It is even more important for those who are handicapped from the start.

At the very beginning of the child's life one must start with rhymes and lullabyes and picture books. This is one of the most important pieces of advice that doctors, psychologists and welfare workers can give the parents of handicapped children. They must be able to obtain counsel as to which books they should buy or borrow from the library. Librarians should also realize that it is the parents of disabled children who are most in need of constant good advice and help to find suitable books. Here one can use most of the usual picture books for language-retarded children, provided they are not too complicated or frightening. It is important that we use them, as at this age one lays the foundation for interest in books. Not only will good picture books make children familiar with books so that they will profit by them for the rest of their lives, they will also help brain damaged, autistic and retarded children to learn to concentrate at an early age.

Children should be familiar with books before they become conscious of their own language problems. They need to have a good relationship with books before books become a problem, which they undoubtedly will later on since the written word is more difficult to master than the spoken

word. Learning to read is complicated and the feeling of defeat can be overwhelming when one has problems with both talking and reading. Books must be associated with happy feelings from the earliest age, while the child sits on the lap and parent and child look at books together. This is important in trying to lay a foundation for their future. Many children with delayed speech will never get as far as asking anybody to read to them. The adult must take the initiative. When it comes to the most helpless ones, it is often of no use to read to them. Instead we must tell them very simple stories, repeating the less common words in many different contexts and pointing at the pictures, talking quietly.

Not only parents but other adults as well should help to stimulate speech by means of picture books and rhymes. Handicapped children need kindergarten staff and school teachers and social workers for speech training and contact. The difficulties in obtaining the right books increase as the children grow. When they discover that they talk and are not understood, or do not understand others, or cannot find the right words, it is not surprising that they avoid books, for books consist of words and words are associated with confusion and defeat. It is therefore important to obtain a good relationshop with books from the earliest years. But it is never too late to begin. Even when the children grow older one should continue to use picture books but not books for small children. One should search for illustrations of things and activities which interest them. Picture books are necessary throughout childhood. The pictures must tell a story and the text must be brief and simple. Gradually one can pass over to books with more text and fewer pictures. Even if the contents are simple or trivial, one

must not forget the significance of recognizing feelings: loneliness, anger, or happiness. The story should end safely, however, not in fear or anger.

Development of language and reading go hand in hand and it is therefore important that we produce books for these language retarded children that will encourage them to communicate. In our society, reading is the key to information. In reading to the handicapped child, the results perhaps will show much later on. We must realize, however, that the development of language and the corresponding level of reading are often delayed several years.

For those who struggle with the art of reading, we need a wide choice of books. As a matter of course, we need many easily read books which are tempting and amusing. We need them for the other children too, but we need them far more for those who strive very hard to read so that they will feel that their efforts are worthwhile. We must have easily read books for different interests and age groups, and we must use insight and knowledge of what makes a book easily read.

To conclude: The child needs picture books and rhymes, and it needs to be read to even after it has learnt to read. There is a need for easy reading material while one is learning to read, even if the learning process should last ten years instead of one. There is a need for gradually more difficult books with varied and wide ranging content at every stage. The children should become familiar with books from their earliest years. They can only obtain this by continually having a wide range of good books. They need to be read to as often as possible, to enrich their

vocabulary, and to stimulate their imagination. Their parents and others who have them in their care need guidance in finding suitable literature.

"Suddenly, as we were walking along, Britta took out her story book and smelt it. Then we all smelt it too. New books smell so good that you can almost feel from the smell how lovely it will be read them", the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren writes in "The Six Bullerby Children". We wish all children could share such experiences.

CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS

Many of our handicapped children still live in large institutions from early childhood. It is important that we realize that life in an institution is an artificial form of existence for children: they become estranged from the important processes of life when they live together day and night with nothing more in common than the same handicap. They have only a few adults with them who come and go at specific times, but who relax and have a good time in other surroundings. Usually it is only the child's primary needs that are satisfied, such as food, clothing, a bed, and one hopes, school or another form of pedagogic activity. All such activities school, kindergarten, workshop or hobby work - take place during the morning. Afternoons and evenings, Sundays and holidays, are long. Many sit through their childhood and, later on, youth and adult life, evening after evening, Sunday after Sunday, holiday after holiday. It would be a help to them to have books. In these institutions children and young people must go to bed earlier than normal for their ages. They should in any case be able to read in bed, or those who cannot read should be read to, or be able to look at the pictures in books.

Unfortunately, many of the staff in institutions are without knowledge of children's literature. Much experience has, however, been gained in the institutions which use books as part of daily life. Often the local librarians contact the institutions, visit the children, and invite them to the libraries. Naturally, children's books cannot compensate for the sterility of institutional life, but they can provide much needed contact and pleasure and give children an idea of life in the outside world.

Institutions for handicapped children are the opposite of integration, but by contact with libraries one can break through the massive segregation. With a varied choice of children's literature one can also prepare children for integration and a life they will meet later on.

Many children and young people stay temporarily in hospitals. In our economically developed countries road accidents increase from year to year, and many of the people injured are children and young people. Some of them will be so seriously maimed that they cannot even hold a book or turn pages. They need electric page turners or other technical reading aids. This is also the case with many spastics who have great difficulty in keeping their heads and arms still, or who cannot manage to relax completely their muscles.

Cushla, whom we met in Cushla and her books, stayed in hospitals for shorter or longer periods during her first years of life. She always had her beloved children's books with her. A stay in hospital is an especially heavy burden for children, and it is obvious that one must give them every possible feeling of security and happiness. Often they need simple and humorous books with many pictures. All of us, regardless of age, prefer lighter reading when we feel tired or unwell. Those who have a long stay in hospital need a quantity of good books. They need contact and adventure just as much as medical treatment. Books are not only needed for education and intellectual stimulation, but also to present the experiences that most people have in common. Those who feel themselves different and isolated are especially in need of the experiences.

It is society's responsibility to provide the conditions that enable children and young people to grow up in as natural and ordinary surroundings as possible. Books can be relevant as a help to prepare oneself for the adult world, especially books which take up social problems, young people's attitudes to sex, and books which generally speaking elucidate our common problems. "I began to write because I believed that a person's loneliness would diminish if one knew that everybody else was just as lonely", the Swedish author Hans Peterson once said. "Really I write books so that some children will feel less lonely, and to make children and adults talk to each other." Books can be a help to start conversation and to discuss problems, especially for those who are accustomed to hiding themselves away. Books give a feeling of fellowship.

WHAT SPECIAL KIND OF BOOKS DO WE NEED?

Cushla in Cushla and her books had lots of children's books, because her parents were acquainted with this literature. Handicapped children - whatever their handicap - are fortunate when they have parents or teachers or staff personnel who love children's books themselves, or, as a matter of course, contact children's libraries. A good many of the usual picture books and collections of lullabyes and rhymes and songs and adventures can also be used for handicapped children. In some countries catalogues are made with titles specially recommended for mentally retarded, deaf or other groups of language retarded children (Australia, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, USA, for example).

But even if we can use many ordinary children's books, there will be a need for books specially made for handicapped children. If they cannot see they will need books in braille, talking books and tactile books. Other children who are partially sighted need books with large print. Deaf children, for whom sign language is their own language, need books with sign language. Mentally retarded children and other children with delayed speech and language need very simple picture books. Our many reading retarded children need easy reading books, so they can feel that their striving with books will be worthwhile.

Books in braille

It is easy to understand that children who cannot see pictures and print in books need literature especially made

for them. We have had braille ever since the Frenchman Louis Braille, who himself was blind, invented the system of writing a hundred and fifty years ago. His system consists of six raised points on paper, from which it is possible to achieve 63 different permutations. They can be used for letters, figures, musical notation, and other signs.

Many countries have children's books in braille, however these books are more often than not produced and owned by organizations for the blind and are not to be found in public libraries. Children's books in braille should, of course, be represented there along with books for other children. Catalogues and book lists show that books produced in braille are mostly books for adults. It is not surprising, as there are far more blind adults than blind children. But it is during childhood when our habits are formed and we receive our fundamental training that we are most easily influenced. Suitable training, which is necessary to enable the blind to manage for themselves in the communities where they live should include the enjoyment of children's books.

Those who are blind from early childhood before they can talk are, of course, at a greater disadvantage than those who lose their sight later on, as they have no visual memories to support them. Speech will therefore be far more difficult. Children with impaired vision need books to gain experience and to increase their vocabulary.

Talking books

In addition to books in braille we have talking books. Since tape recorders and cassette players have come into

daily use in many countries, blind people now have a much greater possibility for a better choice of reading material.

In order to enable blind children to benefit from children's books there must be a wide choice of talking books. They can listen to these books together with their friends who are not blind, thus lessening the distance between them.

Talking books are also of great significance for other groups of disabled people with reading problems and physically handicapped persons who cannot hold a book. For the deaf-blind - who are perhaps the loneliest of all - books in braille are the only possible reading material. For most blind people, both children and adults, books in braille and talking books will supplement each other. As for fiction, there is a tendency to prefer talking books, while textbooks, educational literature and reference books are preferable in braille. It is important to have plenty of books in braille for blind children who are learning to read although they should not have to wait until they can manage to read books in braille to enjoy children's books. They need to listen to books just as much as other children. Children's books in braille are also necessary so that parents who are blind can read to their children.

Tactile books

Most of us are so unimaginative that we do not immediately understand that blind and partially sighted children also need picture books, just as do other children. Those whose sight is not too poor can benefit from ordinary picture books, provided the contrasts are sharp enough and the colours clear so that the details do not merge with each

other. Those who are completely blind must experience pictures through their finger-tips.

Many teachers and parents therefore have made by hand books for their children. They glue and paste in figures for the children to feel. As a rule they change ordinary picture books into tactile books. The problem is that blind children do not usually have the necessary experience to interpret these figurative pictures. If we who can see are given a tactile book with a small sized house cut out of veneer and glued onto the page, or the contour of a sheep glued with wool, we will recognize at once that this is a picture book about Ba Ba Black Sheep, or one about a house in the forest. Those who have never seen a sheep or a tree or a house or a flower simply do not know what a tree or a house or a flower is like. For example, blind children are unable to understand a landscape picture as they are used to receiving information through the tips of their fingers.

How can I make what I cannot see is the title of a book by the Japanese Shiro Fukurai. His starting point is the conceptual world of blind children and their creative drive. He holds that the artist must learn and use the blind child's own symbols instead of trying to force his symbols on them.

Virginia Allen Jensen in Denmark and Philip Newth in Norway are both influenced by Shiro Fukurai, and they have used nonfiguratives as main persons in their tactile books. About her book What is that? Virginia Allen Jensen said in a lecture:

> "It is nearly impossible for you and me to perceive a world void of visual experience. Even if we could, we would still be confronted with the question of whether - and if so, when and how - we should try to teach blind

children what visual experience is, or whether we should only give them illustrations that require no visual experience. All experiments must and should be done in cooperation with sight handicapped children, their parents or teachers.

The main problem in creating a book that blind and sighted children can use together is to find a meeting ground for both, and this is difficult for adults who are conditioned to conventional thinking. The interaction between text and picture is of much greater importance in these books than in ordinary picture books. The text has to be worded very carefully so as to guide the sighted and blind reader to the same conception of the picture without coming into conflict with the reader's previous experience (or lack of it!). There should be nothing in the picture that makes the blind child feel cheated; that is, when a sighted and a blind child are reading the book together they should have an equal chance to see everything in the book - except for colour."

Some artists and publishers have taken up the challenge of trying to find, by means of imagination and reflection, abstracts which may be mass produced and with which a child is able to identify and which blind children are able to conceptualize without any visual experience. Circles and squares and triangles are the main "persons" in a book by Philip Newth, who cut the figures out of cardboard. A little rough oval shape became Virginia Allen Jensen's main person. The intention was to make books fit for mass production so that they could be sold in large numbers through the ordinary channels of book distribution. To children, blind or sighted, it means a lot to own books of their own, taking them along to bed at night, or lending them to others. And to parents and relatives it means a great deal to be able to walk into a book shop and buy a book for a blind child.

It is, however, difficult to make such books as Philip Newth has said:

"The visual culture is dominant; language, which is also the communication form of the blind, is packed with

visual concepts. If they do not accept the fact that the sun is golden, the grass is green, their language would be very poor indeed. Long before sighted children can read letters, they experience through pictures. They look at known and unknown things on a flat page, reductions of large three dimensional forms to small two dimensional forms. They learn depth, perspective - dimensions can be reduced with the aid of colour or shadow. They become acquainted with representations of ideas. Their development is activated and stimulated by pictures. Throughout their school years this development continues, where almost all teaching material is richly illustrated to support the written word. The blind are a minority among an overwhelming majority. Of course blind people must live in a "sighted society", but must the adjustments always have to occur on the sighted person's terms?

Blind children have to accept phrases such as: An elephant is as big as a house. What does a phrase like that mean to someone who only perceives dimensions as far as his fingers can reach. Which conflicts arise when one has to accept without first having experienced? "

It is important that blind children and sighted children have opportunities to experience something together. It is useful even to sighted children to train their tactile faculties. And when feeling their way through a tactile book, preferably with closed eyes, they get an idea, however slight, of how it is to be unable to see, having to experience things by means of their finger tips.

About making books for blind children (and also books in sign language for deaf children) Mette and Philip Newth write:

"Most of the handicapped receive in addition to their handicap a burden placed by society that has hardly considered their handicap. They have greater difficulty in orientating themselves in society, obtaining an identity and self confidence and becoming active, vigorous persons, than the majority does.

Adapted literature for the handicapped cannot solve all the major problems, but can aid in the removal of unnecessary obstacles and cast light on some of the problems. Adapted literature for children with reading difficulties can give important information to the

ordinary reader. Adapting books for other than the ordinary reader does not imply that the author or illustrator loses his contents or message. It is the form that must be changed. Adaptation does not mean restriction for the author or illustrator, on the contrary, it offers immense, exciting challenges. What the author and illustrator can offer is their experience and knowledge of methods and means, their ideas and what they are trying to convey.

The handicapped can offer a completely different way of experiencing the world, completely new dimensions in language and form. Combined, this enriches literature, yet these resources have hardly been used. Even the first tiny steps taken by us in that direction, show quite clearly that the majority has so much of infinite value to learn from the minorities. It requires much more than good intentions and understanding from the author and illustrator. It requires readjustment, tenacity and patience. The author and illustrator must learn to be able to create".

Large print books

There are more partially sighted children than completely blind children. Methods and aids will differ greatly within these groups. While blind children have books in braille, tactile books and talking books, many of the children with low vision are able to read ordinary books, provided that the print is large enough and the layout suitable for the needs of children with impaired vision.

Not only do parents, teachers, librarians and publishers now realize the importance of books for handicapped children, other professions have also become interested. Eye specialists, for instance, want partially sighted children to have low vision training which is important for the development of vision. It has been proved that if these children receive numerous visual impressions from an early age and the necessary assistance, they will be able to utilize their residual vision fully. They will be able to see better even though the eye itself is unchanged. They should also be

assisted towards receiving as many clear visual impressions as possible. They will then be able to remember and recognize objects once seen when they see them again.

Since 1960 special attention has been paid to children with low vision and it has been realized how important it is for them to read ordinary books. Previously, they were usually treated as if they were blind as far as education was concerned. "The large print revolution" became a catchword. Most of the large print books were made mainly for adults, as were most books in braille. However, it goes without saying that reading practice during childhood is especially important.

Large print books as well as talking books should be useful to several groups of disabled persons. Those who are so seriously disabled that they cannot hold a book need books with large enough print to be read even at a distance. This concerns some of those who suffer from cerebral palsy and also those who are in an iron lung. It often happens that books made for a specific group of handicapped people can also be used by other groups. Therefore it is important that librarians and specially trained teachers keep themselves informed as to what is being published, and that the publishers are aware that the demand is usually larger than they ordinarily tend to expect. Had there been a sufficient number of books in larger print in the past, it would have been unnecessary for so many people to be handicapped in relation to books.

Books specially suited to the disabled reader, will nevertheless be only a small part of the total production of books for children. The greatest challenge to publishers is to put out more ordinary literature in a form also suitable for the disabled reader. Naturally it is difficult

to establish specific criteria, the degree of vision and technical reading ability differing to such an extent from individual to individual, not to mention reading interests and susceptibility to impulses from art. Even so it is possible to give some general guidelines. For instance: when producing reading matter for the partially sighted one has to exercise much care in choosing print. It has to be suitable for enlargement by technical means and should be usable for optacon and closed circuit television (CCTV), for instance Helvetica 14 p. Some enlargement is also desirable to make it possible to increase the reading/working distance, thereby improving one's reading/working position. On the other hand, the enlargement should not be too extensive as it then becomes difficult to apprehend the image of the whole word.

We should be aware that it is both difficult and important for the partially sighted reader to be able to form a total picture. While those with normal sight usually form a complete view first and then notice the details, blind and partially sighted people as a rule concentrate on the details first, with their eyes or fingertips, and then try to imagine the whole picture. Highly detailed illustrations can be confusing to those who can only see the picture bit by bit, and to one who has difficulties in understanding a a complicated image. Therefore it is important that artists and publishers obtain the necessary information on what makes a book usable for as many readers as possible. In a book for partially sighted readers it is advisable to eliminate all unnecessary details, in order to make central motives stand out clearly.

As for general layout, the criteria applying to reading matter for partially sighted people are much the same as

those which w[illegible] be mentioned in connection with books for the reading retarded.

Books with sign language

The situation of those who were blind or partially sighted from birth or early childhood is very different from that of those whose sight was damaged later in life when their speech was already developed. The difference is even greater between those who are born deaf or have greatly reduced hearing from infancy and those who have lost their hearing after they have learnt to talk. The worst handicap in being deaf is that one cannot imitate speech. The conceptual structure of those who are deaf from infancy is totally different from that of those who can hear. The cultural isolation in which the deaf often find themselves may lead to severe psychological complications. In recent years one has become increasingly aware of how important it is for young deaf children to learn sign language as early as possible. Deaf children who learn sign language as early as children with normal hearing learn to talk will find it easier to grasp the function of the spoken language and its symbols when they are older.

Parents, teachers and other people who have daily contact with deaf children can, of course, interpret books into sign language when they read to the children. It is an advantage however, if they have books with illustrations in sign language, although very few of these exist in the world. Such books are of great importance as they give deaf children the chance to enjoy being read to just like ordinary children. Most children and young people who discover sign language are fascinated by it. It is an expressive language with far more movement and bodily expression than our ordinary spoken language. Children's books in sign language contribute to

the spreading of information about this language to other people than those who are deaf themselves.

Picture books for children with delayed speech and language

Disabled children are just as different from one another as other children are. Even so, some handicaps, such as lack of hearing, will give those who suffer from it a mutual background and experience, or lack of experience. The differences between the deaf child and the child who can hear originate as far back as the embryo stage. The deaf child cannot hear its mother's heartbeat in the same way as other unborn babies do. Observation of deaf babies shows that their baby talk is less varied and their crying more monotonous than that of babies who can hear.

We do not need much imagination to understand that the understanding of speech and the very idea of speech present a great problem to those who have difficulties in hearing. We who are blessed with normal hearing can scarcely imagine a world without sound or without training in the use of words. Throughout life, deaf people receive a smaller share of social and cultural activities than others do, even if they exert themselves much more than those who can hear. Partially deaf children need more time to understand concepts than other children who receive impressions through their ears all day long.

The situation for those with speech disorders due to brain damage is just as serious. They hear, but do not understand the meaning of what they hear, or they are not able to use speech as a means of expressing themselves. These are the children with developmental dysphasia. Their reaction to speech and books at an early age resembles that of the deaf. In serious cases of developmental dysphasia the children are

at a disadvantage because they have greater difficulty in grasping the use of symbols in language, resulting often in serious emotional disturbances. One can well imagine that it is more difficult to listen to something one does not understand than not to hear at all.

Autistic children are often without speech and, like deaf children and children with developmental dysphasia, they are frequently wrongly diagnosed as mentally retarded. Some of them may also have this handicap, but that is not the general rule. In addition, autistic children have perceptual disorders. They do not play or behave in the usual manner. Many of them can be taught to talk, but even then they do not always seem to understand the function of speech as a means of communication. Their speech is not normal; they omit small words and repeat what is already said. It seems as if they withdraw into their own world, stare at their fingers and bang their heads against the wall. Many of them have difficulty in using personal pronouns. It is a great achievement when they can say I, but from I to me, and from we to us can be an uphill journey.

Concerning autistic children, many specialists regard language disorders as the central problem, and speech training is of primary importance.
Sometimes these children learn to read even if they cannot talk, as, for example, a boy who began to talk when he was eight years old, but who could already read.
Dibs, the boy in Virginia M. Axlines book Dibs - in search of self gives us a feeling of what words and books can mean to one who has withdrawn into himself and perceived and learnt in silence. His enjoyment of words, and of books, should be a cautious inspiration to us:

> "Books!" Dibs said. "Books and books and books." He lightly ran his fingers over the books. "I love books",

he said. And isn't it funny that little black marks on paper can be so good? Pieces of paper and little tiny black marks and you've got a story."

Dibs loved colours. That tells us something of the need for colourful picture books. Dibs made a song about the blue colour in his paintbox:

"Oh, paint! Oh, paint so blue!
What, oh what, is it you can do?
You can paint a sky.
You can paint a river.
You can paint a flower.
You can paint a bird.
All things are blue
If you make them blue.
Oh, blue paint, oh, paint so blue!

It'll spill. It'll slop.
It'll run. It'll drop.
My lovely, blue paint, it will.
It's a moving color.
It moves and moves.
Oh blue! Oh blue! Oh blue!"

When we find that some children learn to read before they can talk, and that as teenagers they sing rhymes, lullabyes and songs which were sung to them when they were small and we had no idea that they had learnt them, and when we discover their pleasure in colours, rhythms and melodies - then we understand how much picture books and song books mean to our handicapped children. Most of us underestimate those who cannot talk.

We also underestimate our mentally retarded children, because their intelligence is not like ours. Even though their means of expressing themselves is limited and their speech is poor and their abilities in general are limited in proportion to the rest of the population, they have the same need for experience and development. Reading books and having other experiences of art can satisfy some of these needs. Here too, there are great individual variations, from

the weakest and most helpless to those who might be able to manage for themselves when they grow up.

The largest group of mentally retarded are those who can manage very simple reading before they have become adults, provided they have had a chance to learn. There is no sharp division between them and children with what we call normal intelligence and an ordinary reading skill.

All children need books, even those who will never manage to read or understand the meaning of the written word. Picture books are necessary for all groups, and song books too, so that parents and teachers can sing for, and perhaps with, their mentally retarded children. And there is a need for simple stories in which they can recognize their own feelings and experiences.

As has been said previously it is easiest in early childhood, because we can use many of the good picture books, readily available. Many deaf, brain damaged or mentally retarded children have had much pleasure from the books about Thomas and Emmy by the Swedish Gunilla Wolde, the books by the German Ali Mitgush with pictures from towns, harbours and farms, and the American Eric Carle's colourful books. They are attractive and give recognition of objects from daily life, or give impulses to the imagination, or quite simply offer the child an esthetic experience.

Picture books which are not too childish can be used also while the child is growing older. But to find such picture books for children who have reached the age when most children have outgrown them is a difficult problem.

Even if he cannot talk, or speaks ever so poorly, a twelve-year-old is a twelve-year-old and of course should not have

a baby book but a book which reflects his own age group. Although speech develops late, one still grows from a small child to a school child and to a young person who has needs for suitable books at all stages of childhood and youth. We should not give books with pictures of dressed up teddies and elephants to a 12-15-year old, but instead find books reflecting the interests of his or her age group. We often find that the most fascinating picture books are those with pictures from daily life. Even those who cannot talk, or speak very badly and cannot read, have their favorite subjects, their special interests just as other young people have: aeroplanes, space ships, trains, ships, cars, food, houses, forests, mountains, streets - the choice is endless.

Among disabled children there is just as wide a range of interests and the intensity of these interests is as great as among other children, provided they are given the opportunity to develop them. They also enjoy searching for their topics of interests in picture books.

Colours give pleasure to many and art books can be a rich source of esthetic inspiration. As the sense of rhythm is often well developed, one can read simple poetry aloud, thereby giving them a rare emotional and esthetic experience. Our language retarded children, just as other children, need to experience books alone, look at pictures, turn the pages and read at their own pace. And they also need to be read to in small groups. As they grow older the need for easily read books increases. The books should have pictures of the subjects and activities which interest older children and young people. And we need pictures of people who are happy, unhappy, cross or distressed, preferably young people with whom the readers can identify. A varied supply of interesting picture books for our language retarded children and young people would encourage them to learn to read.

In recent years publishers have cooperated in printing a number of non-fiction books which could be suitable for our language retarded children. But if the local milieu disappears in these books, if the characters live in a sort of no man's land so that these books may be sold in all countries, they are not really satisfactory for anyone, and especially not to mentally handicapped picture readers who need to recognize a genuine milieu.

Easy reading books

Dorothy Butler writes in Cushla and her books:

> "Cushla was not "taught" to read, unless the provision of language and story, in books and out of books, can be called a method.
>
> I believe it can, and that is the best method of all. It produces children who experience reading as a joyous process, natural to the human state; children who absorb ideas as sponges absorb water. That this eager ingestion helps such children to find meaning in the complex and contradictory experiences that constitute life is self-evident."

It is evident that a varied choice of children's books from infancy will secure a good relationship with books for the rest of life and will also increase vocabulary and stimulate the imagination. We know that children who have grown up with picture books, rhymes and reading aloud have a better starting position when they go to school. It is specially important to children who later on in life turn out to be reading retarded. If it is difficult to learn to talk, it will be even more difficult to learn to read.

In addition to those who are language retarded, we have those who are "only" reading retarded. This is the most common of all handicaps. Between 10 and 20% of all pupils in economically developed countries leave school without adequate reading skill for everyday life. It is fundamental

for their education as a whole that they learn to read, as reading is the key to most information. Those who cannot manage to read, or who read poorly, have increasing problems as the printed word plays an ever greater role in all parts of the world.

A characteristic of most psychological and pedagogical books and periodicals is that the authors, to a large extent, have devoted themselves to retarded language development, learning difficulties and reading disabilities, and somehow have forgotten or do not realize that lullabyes and picture books stimulate language at pre-school age, and that children of school and youth age who work very hard to learn to read need fascinating books to make reading worthwhile. It is only recently that authors and publishers have become interested in the problems of disabled children and realize that those who struggle most when learning to read should have the most attractive books.

It is evident that an easily read, amusing and engaging book encourages interest in reading, whereas dull and boring books have the reverse effect. Good books give what we call positive motivation. While children usually need a year to learn to read, intelligent reading retarded children need several years, perhaps their entire time in elementary school, before they learn to read at the average normal speed. And that is in the best of circumstances, when they have good instruction and good reading material, including a wide choice of easily read books. We learn to read only by reading. We learn to choose only when the selection is sufficiently large and good enough.

What makes a book easy-reading? We must be critical as to the appearance of the book, its typography and layout. The

lines should be short, preferably not more than 10 cms. The letters should be comparatively large, but not so large that each letter stands in isolation. Grotesque type should be avoided. There should be ample distance between the words, but not so large that each word stands out alone. Likewise, the distance between the lines should be generous, but not so great that the coherence between the lines on the page is lost. The paper ought to contrast well with the black type; off-white or slightly yellowish paper works well, while absolutely white or glossy paper dazzles and is unpleasant to look at. It is important that the paper not be too thin or looze in structure. The book should not be so big as to feel overwhelming. The text should be divided into fairly short chapters, and the chapters into paragraphs, enabling the reader to take many pauses.

These requirements pertain both to dyslectic pupils and to those who have difficulties in learning to read as a result of other handicaps: those who are brain damaged, deaf, mentally retarded or partially sighted. If the book appears to be easily read it will encourage the pupil to make the effort to read and it makes actual reading easer. For young people it is quite important that the books they are given do not look childish. They will then be encouraged to take the trouble to read somewhat smaller print, while small children prefer large print.

We must make demands on the placing and content of the illustrations. In many cases the book itself is a barrier. But an attractive cover helps and the illustrations should motivate reading. They should be placed as near to the corresponding part of the text as possible, supplementing the text and describing situations which would otherwise require a great many words. It is, of course, of great importance that the illustrations in no way clash with the text.

Of course these demands on the illustrations vary a great deal according to the needs of the reader - whether the reader is primarily reading retarded or mentally retarded. To the mentally retarded reader it will usually be important that the objects shown are in proportion, a small house must be small and a big elephant must be big if they are shown in the same picture. And they must keep the same size throughout the book. Drawings which are not true to nature may confuse. For the partially sighted it is more important that the contours are clear, and that there are not too many details.

We must make demands on the language in the book. It should be simple language, preferably short sentences so constructed that they are suitable for short lines. The words should not be too long and new words should be repeated in different contexts; no foreign or very unusual words should be used. The demands on language vary a great deal, however, depending upon what group of children we are thinking of, mentally retarded or reading retarded with normal intellingence. Partially sighted children do not need a specially easy language. To them the physical appearance of the book, cover, typography and layout, is most important. As a rule reading retarded children also tolerate more difficult words and abstracts ideas, provided they know the words beforehand. Deaf children have difficulties in understanding picture language and metaphors, and words having to do with sound impressions. But it also appears that if the printed text - the story - is exciting enough, these children are able to manage quite difficult words.

We must set a standard for the content of the book. Those children and young people who need easy reading material also have as great a need for a wide range of subjects as other children and young people. Some children like a lot of action, others prefer stories with the emphasis

primarily on human relationships. But one thing is common: the story must not go on too long before the action starts. Lengthy descriptions which seem to get nowhere should be avoided. And dialogue makes a book more easily read. The most important thing is that the content interest and engage the reader. One can then go in for more difficult reading, and the content should suit the age group. The text has to be simple for those who are mentally retarded, but this does not of course pertain to those who are merely reading retarded and partially sighted. As a general rule we can say that the more difficult the subject matter, the simpler the language should be. Perhaps this is the reason why those few writers who have tried to write especially for reading retarded children have found it enriching to their literary work in general. They have compared it to writing poetry: one has to find the only suitable word - that one word that suits the style, the rhythm and the subject matter.

One needs an abundant choice of books for reading retarded children and young people, varied subject matter and degree of difficulty. Parallel to making books for those who are reading retarded, we must endeavour to make ordinary children's books more attractive. Publishers must be aware that these books are presented to children who have learnt to read only with very great difficulty. The real challenge is to make a larger number of ordinary children's books more attractive and more easy to read.

Perhaps it would be useful for those of us who work daily with books and have difficulty in believing that books can be a barrier, to try to imagine what it would be like if all books were published only in a language which we could hardly understand. We would then choose a book which was not too big and with easily read type, not too many difficult and new

words on each page, and with illustrations. It would have a comfortable distance between lines, paragraphs and chapters, and the illustrations would enrich the story and inspire further reading. Above all, it would be a good book which holds attention.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AS A STARTING POINT FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES

The very act of reading is very difficult for most children who are handicapped sensorily or mentally. Their need for artistic experience is just as great as that of other children. Like other children, they should have the opportunities for play and development, but many of them do not have the imagination needed to start playing or to try to create something without help. And the adults in their environment are a cross section of the population wherein only a few have surplus energy to be imaginative in their play with children. However, picture books, stories and songs are sources of inspiration. Libraries have often provided enjoyment for many handicapped children when they have invited them to storytelling sessions, slide shows from picture books, puppetry or films. First and foremost it has meant social contact and experiences and something to talk about afterwards.

In addition to speech as a tool in communication, we can gesticulate and use mimicry to give more life to the story in the books. Or we can play music which suits the pictures. It is far from easy to find out for oneself the best means to activate children. But pictures in books can give both children and adults ideas. We can make the persons that we find in the books, either draw them or fashion puppets of them. Puppetry has proved to be especially beneficial to many of the mentally retarded. Simple picture books with a lot of movement in the pictures (for instance books by the Ezra Jack Keats and Eric Carle) can also inspire the children to movement and perhaps to dance the whole story of the picture book.

Music and dance have often proved to be the prelude to language learning, contact and mental development. It happens that mentally retarded children know the songs and rhymes by heart even though they have never used speech for other purposes. Music and songs have in some cases liberated a speech which was latent. Even if the words are not always understood, the rhythm and melodies make the children feel good and give them as a result a sense of self esteem as to their own capabilities. Drama and other creative activities, such as drawing, painting, modelling, movement and music often provide the children outlets for such moods and feelings which they otherwise have had to keep to themselves. In this process children's books can be sources of inspiration. If emotional needs are not satisfied, the child's intellectual development and his entire personality may be damaged.

In early childhood it is not unusual that autistic and brain-damaged children have severe restless periods. Singing softly to them and playing rhythmical music calms them. Best of all for this purpose are lullabyes and folk songs.

Jean Vanier, the founder and director of the l'Arche movement says:

> "Since their infancy almost all the handicapped have been wounded not only organically but by so many looks of pity, disdain and indifference that have made them feel worthless and inferior and have destroyed any confidence they may have had in themselves".

Most of us gravely underrate intellectually, emotionally and socially those who have no verbal language or very little of it, or who have no reading faculties. Handicapped children need to feel they are of value, that they have something to offer, that they are part of a community. Reading aloud, singing, music, dancing and other creative activities open up for them the joys of fellowship.

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN IN BOOKS

It is important for handicapped children to meet themselves in children's books, to see pictures and read about children like themselves, their lives, problems, feelings, circumstances. And it is important for other children to get acquainted with handicapped children. As mentioned earlier, an unfortunate segregation policy in many of our countries has for decades placed many handicapped children outside our neighbourhoods. It is thus all the more necessary that we meet them in books to prepare the soil for integration.

Our "ego" undergoes its richest development in interaction with a "you", registering other people's reactions to us. Mentally retarded, physically handicapped or other disabled children almost never see children like themselves on television or in films, unless the programme specifically concerns handicapped children. They almost never belong to their environments in mass media as naturally as other children do. If one never reads about anyone like oneself or meets anyone like that in television or on the radio, it is a sort of affirmation that one is not good enough or does not belong anywhere or has no value.

During the last decade quite a few books have appeared about handicapped children, but many of them are not good enough. They often activate our mechanisms of rejection and make integration even more difficult. Because literature influences us for better or for worse, especially when we are children, it is important to evaluate it critically. So many books are well-intentioned and the author has surely tried to encourage understanding, and yet the results are disappointing. The most important questions concerning these books will be: Do they give good information and

possibilities for identification in addition to valuable literary experiences? Do they broaden our understanding of the handicapped person and his situation, or do they confirm or strengthen our mechanisms of rejection?

There is the hidden rejection found in many well-intentioned books where healthy young people who meet handicapped persons are filled with gratitude for their own good health. The underlying attitude is that the normal thing is to be healthy, beautiful and charming - and the handicap somehow is a kind of punishment for our sins.

In yesterday's books we often met wealthy children who gave poor children alms. In contemporary books in western cultures, handicapped children have replaced poverty-stricken children and the lesson is that one should be kind to handicapped children. We have a good many books about children who collect money for the benefit of mentally handicapped children. And the mentally handicapped are for ever children, happy and trusting and so grateful for so little. There is no room for individuality - in spite of the fact that mentally handicapped people are, as individuals, as different from one another as we are who are not mentally handicapped.

In children's books about handicapped children we frequently find a certain principle of compensation so heavily stressed that it constitutes a hidden sort of rejection: blind people who automatically, almost by virtue of their blindnes , are so exceptionally kind and good and have such a good ear for music; or the brave boy in a wheel-chair. The blind characters in children's books are mostly girls - it seems so suitable that girls should be sweet and gentle and play the piano. The characters in wheel-chairs are mostly boys, extraordinarily brave and clever boys, the best companion anyone can think of and such excellent referees in a foot-

ball or baseball game. The handicap is compensated far beyond reasonable limits.

One might say that such books give a certain degree of information about the handicapped. But on the whole they give a false picture. A handicap does not automatically make anyone into an extraordinarily fine person. Obviously most of these books are well-intentioned. But good intentions are not enough. The opposite pattern of rejection is heavily utilized in cheap serial literature, spread across the frontiers in an enormous number of copies, in which most frequently the villain is physically handicapped. This kind of reading is a hothouse for discrimination against the handicapped.

An author has to write about what he, in some way or other, has experienced in his own life, his environment, his fantasy, his dreams. He must know something about handicapped people before he writes. There are so many misleading books about mentally handicapped children. Some typical examples: many authors use the description ill when they tell about mentally retarded children. They are not ill, no more than other children unless they have measles or colds or something like that. They are not ill, they are retarded in their mental development. Other authors tell that an autistic child can suddenly become normal if his brother is kind to him, or a girl stops stuttering if she gets a pet, and another boy starts talking when he gets a friend, although he has never been able to talk before. Such things may happen, but very rarely. Handicapped children do not become normal, they just become grown-ups. Most books for young people obviously presuppose that a handicapped young person has no sexual life, not even a sexual urge and they do not even dream about such things. They are featured as neuters. Naturally, this is not true.

Some decades ago parents were often advised to place their mentally handicapped children in institutions at a very early age. In many books the authors still prefer this solution, even if the child is only one or two years old. No responsible person would recommend this today. It shows that the authors know too little about what they are writing. The most common pitfall is to concentrate only on the handicap and make handicapped children very special. The truth is of course that a child with a handicap is first and foremost a child.

Because there are so many pitfalls, it is extremely important that only the best books cross language frontiers. Book-lists registering uncritically all books about handicapped children may do more harm than good, as they confirm our prejudices and spread false information. It is necessary to be critical and reject bad and unsuitable books.

We need books containing good psychological descriptions of the handicapped person as one of the main characters and books where handicapped children belong to their environment as naturally as do other people. Happily, these books exist where the author shows both insight and poetic power. Typical of many of these books is that the author himself states that his books are written both for children and for adults. Many of these authors have experienced a handicap, either personally or among their children, friends or neighbors.

Most children's books about the handicapped tell us about children with physical or sensory handicaps, and the authors' intention is quite obviously to make the readers identify themselves with these children. Books about mentally handicapped children are fewer in number and mostly written from the point of view of a sister or brother.

During the last decade we have seen a number of photographic picture books about handicapped children. Children who read them are usually as fascinated by this documentary material as by fiction. It acquaints them with handicapped children in their daily life. Such books are often excellent for handicapped children as well; they can look at pictures of and read about children who look like themselves and have to struggle with some of the same frustrations.

Especially interesting are picture books made by authors or artists who are themselves parents or siblings of handicapped children using their personal experience and love trying to tell other children how it can be for a family to have a handicapped son or daughter, sister or brother.

In addition to all these books we have those books mentioned earlier: tactile books for the blind and books with sign language for the deaf. These are also fine books for other children. They give them some understanding of how it is to experience pictures through your fingertips, or to understand words by means of signs rather than by listening.

Books which give handicapped children opportunities for identification are also useful sources of information to other children about what it is like to be handicapped.

In many cases it is a relief to read about the experiences of others. It can be a help towards seeing one's own situation in a wider perspective. There is a comfort in knowing that others have been through the same experience, even if their conditions and situations in life are utterly different. For some people fiction can be an inspiration towards giving new insight, awareness and acceptance.

CONCLUSIONS

From research and practical experience we know that children need books for their language development and to facilitate their education. The melodies of lullabyes and the rhythm of poetry stimulate a child's sense of rhythm and body awareness. Children, especially those with handicaps need picture books, rhymes, stories and easy reading books. Books also make their leisure time more meaningful. They need to become familiar with books from infancy.

In order to give all children the opportunities to experience literature, we need books designed with special groups of handicapped children in mind. We need:

- books in braille, talking books, and tactile books for blind children;
- books in large print for partially sighted children;
- books with sign language for deaf children;
- very simple picture books for those delayed in speech and language,
- easy reading books for those many children who are reading retarded.

A number of ordinary picture books, however, and collections of rhymes are also well suited for handicapped children. The problem is that parents, teachers and staff personnel very often are not aware of their existence.

Knowledge of handicapped children and their reading needs should be a compulsory part of the education of librarians. Staff members, teachers and parents of handicapped children should be given a wider knowledge of children's literature.

Authors, artists, and publishers need to become acquainted with the insight of teachers, staff members and parents who

have had experience with different groups of handicapped children. In many cases it will be important to work closely with the handicapped children themselves, to get to know and understand their needs.

The challenge to educators is to make these needs known to the artists, writers and publishers. The challenge to authors, on the other hand, is first and foremost to write texts which are easily read and at the same time meaningful. The challenge to artists is to make illustrations which convey the texts, with regard to the special needs of those who are reading retarded or partially sighted. To make books which are typographically suitable is a challenge to publishers and designers. The challenge to librarians is to make the books available and familiar to those who need them.

All partners in the book professions must contribute to the spread of information and practical experience concerning books for handicapped children as well as research results and lists of suitable books. The world "suitable" is important for one must cast a critical eye on books about handicapped children, especially where the authors show lack of knowledge concerning the handicap they are describing. One must be especially wary of authors who concentrate principally on the handicap itself, making it the main ingredient in the child's personality. What is most important is to make people aware of the books which are good and to encourage their use.

Literature influences us. We need books that show us meeting each other as human beings. Some of us have a handicap, some of us have not. It is important that we get acquainted with each other, in books and in real life.